critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

The House of Bernarda Alba-ANTA Playhouse, 1/7/51. Fourth subscription play in ANTA series features all female cast headed by Katina Paxinou in Federico Garcia Lorca's play...The Royal Family-1/10/51. N.Y.City Center production of Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman play stars Ruth Hussey and Ethel Griffies, scheduled for limited run...Darkness at Noon-Alvin, 1/13/51. Playwrights Company presents Sidney Kingsley's adaptation of Arthur Koestler novel. Starring Claude Rains, directed by Mr. Kingsley.

Digests of Current Reviews -- more on back page

Second Threshold-Morosco, 1/2/51. Philip Barry's last play, revised by Robert Sherwood and produced and staged by Alfred de Liagre, Jr. won salutes of all but two daily reviewers. All but Coleman, Mirror and Sheaffer, Eagle, found it a thoughtful and moving play, an amusing comedy with a deep underlying theme. Acting by small cast headed by Clive Brook and Margaret Phillips was deemed tops, as was direction by producer. Coleman enjoyed the comedy moments, but didn't think the serious side of the characters had time enough to develop. Sheaffer also enjoyed the light moments, but thought the script left too many questions unanswered. Watts, Post, praised play but found many exasperating moments when the play seemed to skirt about its main topic. Betty Von Forstenberg received compliments from Hawkins, WT&S.

An Enemy of the People-Broadhurst, 12/28/50. Split decision filed by daily critics on merits of Arthur Miller's adaptation of Ibsen play, produced by Lars Nordenson, and staged by Robert Lewis. Majority considered script alive and moving, though several pointed out its propaganda aspects. Swift and loud exchanges of dialogue between Frederic March and Morris Carnovsky was judged best, with Florence Eldridge and the remainder of the supporting cast billed as "good". Four critics panned it. Barnes, Herald Tribune, thought it was too much like a 19th century canvas given a Picasso treatment. Coleman, Mirror, wondered what Ibsen would have thought of the addition of the modern slang. Though he called show a "muddle meoded melodrama", he had to admit that the first night audience was thrilled. McClain, Journal American, filed unusual type of review. He enjoyed play, but confessed he was prejudiced against "any play which slyly makes a bum out of our accepted way of life". Hawkins, WT&S, disliked script for its outright soapbox air. Pollock, Compass, considered it the finest and most important drama in town.

Bell, Book and Candle-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Two more diverse reviews in on John van Druten's new comedy about modern witchcraft. Clurman, New Republic, joined majority who found Harrison-Palmer combination delightful in a smooth, easy to take comedy. But McLaughlin, Freeman, believed the characters were much too earthbound for the script.

Editorial Pros and Cons

Irish professional theatre seems to have the only proper and workable solution to the ever present problem of the seating of latecomers. In Dublin no playgoers are seated during the first act, and they mean positively. Such a plan may or may not work with blase New York theatregoers, but it is certainly worth a try.

News & Notes

Damon Runyon Fund performance scheduled for Guys and Dolls on Jan.28th...CBS-TV planning series of Damon Runyon stories, adapted by Abe Burrows, and featuring cast of Guys and Dolls

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the shows for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass
6. NY Post
7. NY Journal American
8. World Telegram & Sun
9. Brooklyn Eagle
10. Newark News
11. Women's Wear Daily
12. Wall Street Journal
13. Journal of Commerce
14. George Jean Nathan
15. Ward Morehouse
16. Morning Telegraph
17. Variety
18. Billboard
19. Theatre Arts
20. New Leader
21. Freeman
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr.Sci.Monitor
25. Sat.Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30. Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.

ARMS AND THE MAN-Arena, 10/26/50. Pro: 4-9-10-11-17-18-21-23-29. Con: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-12-13-14-15-20-26.

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-21-22.

BLESS YOU ALL-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Pro: 13 votes. Con: 1-5-10-11-14-15-17-18-22-24-27-29. None: 12-13-16-19-21-25.

CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-8-12-20-22-25-29. So-So: 14.

THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes: Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22.

GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St. Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 28. None: 16-19-21.

THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.

KING LEAR-National, 12/25/50. Pro: 1-3-5-6-7-9-10-11-17-18-23-26-28-30. Con: 2-4-8-27.

KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29. None: 21-28.

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING-Royale, 12/8/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 3-11-29. So-So: 17-30.

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 14. So-So: 2-27-30.

OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-23. Con: 1-3-9-17-18-20-26 27. So-So: 2.

PEEP SHOW-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-9-10-13-15-16-18-23. Con: 1-2-11-14-19-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-12-17.

PETER PAN-St. James, 4/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 7-14-30. So-So: 12-15-18.

RING ROUND THE MOON-Martin Beck, 11/23/50. Pro: 4-5-6-9-14-15-17-18-20-24-26-28-30. Con: 3-7-8-13-22-23-27. So-So: 1-2.

SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10.

SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 1-2-3-6-7-8-9-10-11-17-18-23-27-29-30. Con: 5-28.

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' Green Room Department '

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PREDICTIONS & WISHES...Forecast for 1951 by Morehouse, WT&S, ended on grim note. Columnist is certain that N.Y.actors, in the event of enemy air attack, will go right on performing in their plays. He also predicted one or two changes in ranks of Broadway dramatic critics...Considine, Journal American, took brighter view. He hopes for a musical half as good as Guys and Dolls, and a twin performance as perfectly schoold and mannered as Lilli Palmer and Rex Harrison... Sullivan, News, hopes that in 1951 the few people in show business who have voiced their objectsion to loyalty oaths, measure up to their obligations.

CAPSULE CRITIQUES...Pun titles suggested by Phillips, WT&S, include Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Guys and Dolls, Ring Round the Moon-Yawn Yesterday, Guys and Dolls-Bell, Bookie and Runyon, Peep Show-For Todd, Country and Yale.

STAGE STRUCK...Political columnist Lerner, Post, considers himself a middling theatregoer. He can take or leave the first nights. But once inside a threatre he catches the footlight fever. Few Broadway seasons pass without having offered two or three things to remember. This term he liked The Lady's Not For Burning, The Country Girl and Guys and Dolls. The latter becaus it fills the theatre with genial warmth and presents a world that is all of one piece.

WHY "HILDA" FAILED...Samson Raphaelson, author of Hilda Crane, is baffled why the the play which looked like a smash hit failed, Morehouse, WT&S, learned. One possibility is that people don't want to see a tragedy with the current headlines.

LIVING THEATRE'S YEAR...Burr, Playbill, and Theatre News Weekly join in saluting the plans of the Council of the Living Theatre. The coming year, comments the latter, gives promise of becoming the year of unbounding opportunity for the living theatre.

TALENT TIP...Video version of "Stage Door Canteen" was suggested by Billboard. It could be set up by network or local station on participating sponsor basis with proceeds going to USO or servicemen's entertainment fund.

JR. CRITIC..."L.E.F." is the 9 year old George Jean Nathan who covers children's shows for Women's Wear. His reaction to Children's World Theatre production of The Three Little Bears contained criticism of adult members of audience for talking too loud.

SHAKY KNEES...Stage fright is universal among top professionals reveals Sobol, Journal American. Examples from theatre include Al Jolson, Sarah Bernhardt, Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes and Ellen Terry.

HANDICAP ACTING...British actress Sheila Sims won praise of critics for her tole in To Dorothy A Son, but only the back of her head is visible to the audience, notes Stage. Her playing shows how an experienced actress can create a living character even when robbed of all but the sound of words.

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' Theatre News Round Up '

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Jose Ferrer Enterprises formed to promote star in seven different phases of show business simultaneously...Stagehands Union plan drive for new theatre contract... Helen Hayes will star in Paramount picture "My Son John"...Three Suns recording tune abount two stars who are baseball fans, entitled "Ethel and Tallulah"...Sam Handleman is organizing a chain of Arena theatres...Press agents for Season in the Sun received a share of the hit as a Christmas gift from the producers...A men's drug company renamed "Jimmy Durante Laboratories, Inc," will feature advertising with the comedian.

' Interview Hi-Lights '

- NOEL COWARD...English author's views, as expressed in advice to Pearl Bailey, Bless You All star, were repeated by Wilson, Post. The writer suggests actors and actresses should stay single. They should give their love exclusively to their audiences. Miss Bailey recently sued her third husband for divorce.

EDITH ATWATER...King Lear featured actress is glad to be in a hit after nine years of flops, she admitted to Fields, Mirror. Her secret ambition is to be a writer. Life hasn't been all flops, as she has toured in hit shows, but her only other New York hit was as the secretary in The Man Who Came to Dinner.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

King Lear-National, 12/25/50. Joseph and Cohen revival of Shakespeare tragedy drew favorable reviews from all but one weekly critic. Discussion continued on whether the play itself was really producable. Francis, Billboard, admitted he did not like the play, but had to admire the current production as the best within memory. Top honors were split between Director John Houseman and Star Louis Calhern. Supporting cast headed by Arnold Moss and Martin Gabel shared praise. Time critic dissented, he didn't think the production had enough philosophic weight or bright enough poetic wings. Marshall, Nation, tabbed Jo Van Fleet as Regan as the best performer. Gibbs, New Yorker, is sure that Charles Lamb was wrong, "Lear" can be a brilliant success and reasonably coherent.

Twentieth Century-Fulton, 12/24/50. ANTA's third production, which moved to a new house for extended run was greeted by group of rave reviews from the weekly appraisers. All but Marshall, Nation, found the revival of the Hecht-MacArthur hilarious and vigorous. Double job of acting and direction by Jose Ferrer was roundly applauded. Clurman, New Republic, found it entertaining though cartoon-like. Marshall discovered the proceedings became very tiresome after the first 45 minutes. She believes Ferrer is becoming obsessed with his own importance, and that his acting is mainly exhibitionism. New Yorker critic believes script is funniest and most technically expert he has seen in years.

Captain Brassbound's Conversion-City Center, 12/27/50-1/6/51. Six "pro" reviews from weekly critics express their combined delight of NYC Theatre Company's revival of the Shaw comedy starring Edna best. Francis, Billboard, saw strong possibilities for the production moving to a commercial theatre. Miss Best walked off with the honors, just as she did from the daily reviewers. Time critic found it pleasant, but never brilliant.

Bless You All-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Three more weekly reviewers panned Rome-Auerbach musical, and for three different reasons. The driest, flattest and spookiest musical in years, that is how it hit George Jean Nathan. Kerr, Commonweal, found many good ideas in the book and lyrics, but a pronounced indecision of what to do with them. While Clurman, New Republic, felt it suffered from a disparity between its intimate material and its lavish production. Valerie Bettis and Pearl Bailey received compliments, but few words of praise were wasted on remainder of cast. Nathan revealed that two daily reviewers who looked very unhappy on opening night filed "pro" reviews, but he kept their names secret for security reasons.

' Legit Stuff '

Shows that closed include Pardon Our French and Mister Roberts...Modern version of "Macbeth" will be telecast Jan.9th on CBS-TV...Joseph Shipley, New Leader, broadcasts reviews opening night on WEVD, New York...Lilli Palmer's first guest on her CBS-TV show was fellow witch Pamela Brown...Variety's 45th anniversary edition features drama articles by Kelcey Allen, Hi Phillips and Helen Hayes...Two on the Aisle musical will contain satires of the current shows.